

**Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Niles, March 22, 1801,
The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes.
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Ford.**

TO NATHANIEL NILES J. MSS.

Washington, Mar 22, 1801.

Dear Sir, —Your favor of Feb 12, which did not get to my hands till Mar 2, is entitled to my acknowledgments. It was the more agreeable as it proved that the esteem I had entertained for you while we were acting together on the public stage, had not been without reciprocated effect. What wonderful scenes have passed since that time! The late chapter of our history furnishes a lesson to man perfectly new. The times have been awful, but they have proved an useful truth, that the good citizen must never despair of the commonwealth. How many good men abandoned the deck, & gave up the vessel as lost. It furnishes a new proof of the falsehood of Montesquieu's doctrine, that a republic can be preserved only in a small territory. The reverse is the truth. Had our territory been even a third only of what it is, we were gone. But while frenzy & delusion like an epidemic, gained certain parts, the residue remained sound & untouched, and held on till their brethren could recover from the temporary delusion; and that circumstance has given me great comfort. There was general alarm during the pending of the election in Congress, lest no President should be chosen, the government be dissolved and anarchy ensue. But the cool determination of the really patriotic to call a convention in that case, which might be on the ground in 8. weeks, and wind up the machine again which had only run down, pointed out to my mind a perpetual & peaceable resource against [*faded*] force (?) [*faded*] in whatever extremity might befall us; and I am certain a convention would have

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commanded immediate and universal obedience. How happy that our army had been disbanded! What might have happened otherwise seems rather a subject of reflection than explanation. You have seen your recommendation of Mr. Willard duly respected. As to yourself, I hope we shall see you again in Congress. Accept assurances of my high respect and attachment.